



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Mayor James L. Streeter, Councilors Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Paulann H. Sheets, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Streeter called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Streeter, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Watson

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

2010-0034 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meetings of January 19, 2010, January 26, 2010, February 2, 2010, February 6, 2010, February 8, 2010, February 9, 2010, and February 16, 2010 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Monteiro, seconded by Councilor Flax, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. NEW BUSINESS

2010-0009 Joint Meeting with Stonington Board of Selectmen (2010 Standing Referral)

Discussed

The Councilors and Selectmen introduced themselves. The first item of discussion was the reorganization of the Probate Court. First Selectman Ed Haberek provided background information on these efforts and encouraged a proactive approach to the consolidation. Mayor Streeter noted that the consensus is that the court will be located in Groton and the municipalities are working out logistics and budget issues.

The next item of discussion was mutual outside agencies (i.e. Mystic and Noank Library, Mystic River Ambulance). Mr. Haberek distributed a library funding analysis prepared by Stonington's Human Services Director. He expressed his desire to support outside agencies and noted that he had increased funding to previous levels in his First Selectman's budget. Mr. Haberek agreed that there is a disparity in funding levels between Stonington and Groton. Mayor Streeter noted receipt of a Mystic and Noank Library Newsletter containing an insert asking Groton patrons to urge greater funding by Groton. The insert including information on the number of library card holders in both Groton and Stonington, which show that Groton paid \$43.71 per card holder and Stonington paid \$18.57 per card holder. Mr. Haberek noted that his budget is subject to cuts by the Board of Finance. He added that he would be happy to participate in a shared services task force in the future.

Town Manager Oefinger stated it is too late in the budget year to make big changes in the Mystic and Noank Library's budget. The newsletter insert unfortunately provided all of the information necessary for those people who want to cut the budget. The two towns should work together to figure out how to fund this library and develop a strategy to come to a more equitable funding arrangement. Councilor O'Beirne agreed that this situation can not continue and he cited it as an example of why regionalism fails. Mr. Haberek agreed that there should be a meeting with the libraries and a commitment made to achieve parity and equity among the three libraries funded by Stonington. He noted that he will continue to advocate for restoration of funding.

Mr. Haberek expressed a desire to identify a quantitative, factual way to develop budget numbers. Selectman Crouse added that the process must also involve the RTM and the Board of Finance. Town Manager Oefinger noted the negative effect a significant decrease in Groton's contribution would have on the library. However, everyone must be on the same page going forward. He suggested developing a five-year plan to wean the libraries off of government funding and bringing them to the table for those discussions. Mr. Haberek agreed with that approach.

With respect to Mystic River Ambulance, there is a nearly 50/50 split of ambulance calls between Groton and Stonington. Town Manager Oefinger reviewed past funding levels from both towns. Mr. Haberek stated that last year's contribution by Stonington was an anomaly and again, he looks forward to being able to fund them at the FY 08-09 level again.

Shared Services between the two towns include the pump out boat and emergency dispatch. The Town of Groton's contribution to the pump out boat is \$19,000. Mr. Haberek noted that Stonington is in the process of discussing establishment of pump out boat service on the Stonington side. The Town Manager provided background information on the issue. Discussion followed on the need for the program, along with the history and status of pump out service for Mouse Island.

Mr. Haberek expressed his desire to identify areas where the two towns can work together with shared services. Councilor O'Beirne asked why the Town of Groton would want to share services with Stonington when Stonington doesn't pay its fair share.

With respect to dispatch, there has been a fair amount of discussion over the last year about providing dispatch services to certain elements in Stonington. Mr. Haberek stated that he is continually looking at dispatch responsibilities, and if there is an opportunity for Groton to provide those services, he will look at it.

Mr. Haberek noted that with a population under 40,000, Stonington must look at joining a health district.

Town Manager Oefinger provided an update on the Mystic Streetscape Project and the impact of the bridge project. Nothing is currently happening with the Central Hall Building project. Mr. Haberek cited the Mystic Cooperative Task Force as a very successful example of Groton and Stonington working together.

Mr. Haberek provided an update on the Mystic Mobility Study. He then expressed his thanks to Barbara Strother, Economic Development Coordinator, for working collaboratively on economic development issues.

There was no further discussion and the Committee took a recess at 7:22 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 7:30 p.m.

2010-0042**Public Hearing on FYE 2011 Proposed Budget****Discussed**

hearing date of March 29th at the Town Hall Annex. Councilor O'Beirne asked that the Board of Education budget review be rescheduled from April 8th to a later date. Discussion followed on adding a third meeting date with the Board of Education.

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2009-0248

FYE 2011 Budget

Discussed

Departmental Budget and Other Account Review with:

- Library
- Human Services
- Public Works

Betty Anne Reiter, Director of Library Services, submitted statistics showing that the Library has seen increases in attendance and circulation. The Library's FYE 2011 budget request reflects consolidation of two divisions into the Public Services division. As such, the level service budget is the same as a zero dollar budget. Approximately \$14,000 in inter-library loan costs was moved to the Connecticut card budget. Postage, mileage reimbursement, book binding, programming and supplies, and materials and supplies budgets have been reduced, and the downloadable audible book service has been eliminated. A print cost recovery system has been implemented, resulting in significant savings.

A 5% decrease budget requires cutting \$91,000, which can only be achieved by eliminating positions and all professional development, as well as cutting the mileage budget further, affecting service to the homebound. Repairs and maintenance would be reduced as well as the programming budget, affecting mainly children and teens. No DVDs or CDs would be purchased.

Councilor O'Beirne asked if an analysis was done on the cost savings associated with closing for a day or the remainder of Sundays. Mr. Reiter responded that Sunday closure would save \$20,000; closing on another day of the week raises union issues and would not result in a dramatic cost savings. Discussion followed on utility cost savings associated with shorter operating hours.

Marge Fondulas, Director of Human Services, stated that she prepared her budget by looking at services rather than percentages. A part-time counselor position at the Family Support Center would be eliminated. Mr. Fondulas explained the Town's role in evictions. The Town will no longer have the items stored by a commercial mover or rent a self-storage unit, but will instead use secured storage containers at the Transfer Station. Mr. Fondulas has also whittled away minor expenses. Over the years, a number of positions in Human Services have been eliminated resulting in a lean operation.

Councilor Monteiro asked if Public Works staff could be used to move items into the storage containers rather than a commercial mover. The Town Manager explained that using Town forces for evictions is not cost effective due to the short notice associated with evictions. It was noted that evictions have not increased as would be expected in this economy.

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, noted that not all Public Works departments provide the same services. He read a prepared statement and Mayor Streeter asked that copies be provided to Councilors. The Public Works budget is based on historical data.

Mr. Schneider reviewed core tasks and goals. He explained that a reduction from a level service budget would 1) impact road maintenance and resurfacing, with an expected impact on the road network pavement condition index (PCI); 2) impact facilities strategic planning; 3) impact the energy procurement strategy and energy efficiency; 4) impact removal of stockpiled catch basin

cleanings; 5) impact management of vacated schools; 6) eliminate support to outside agencies; 7) result in the closure of underutilized structures; 8) result in reactive public facilities management rather than proactive; 9) reduce or eliminate consulting engineering services for studies and projects; 10) reduce vehicles; 11) reduce overtime; 12) result in snow clearing during daytime hours, not overtime hours; and 13) impact staffing levels. A zero dollar budget results in elimination of one full-time equivalent (FTE) and a 5% reduction results in an additional three FTEs for a total of four. Mr. Schneider would recommend boarding up vacant schools for additional cost savings. He explained that the Public Works budget also includes utility costs for all Town buildings and services such as street lighting.

In response to a question from Councilor Flax, Mr. Schneider reviewed specifics of the cleaning reductions. Discussion followed on snow removal in downtown Mystic and installation of building alarms and centralized monitoring in lieu of walk-throughs.

Mr. Schneider noted that cuts will affect internal and external customers. The Town is currently analyzing snow plowing operations, but changes to services are policy decisions. Mr. Schneider noted that other than the vacant schools, the only underutilized Town building is on Central Avenue.

Councilor Peruzzotti noted that the proposed cuts in Public Works are normal in an economic downturn, unlike the concrete, huge sacrifices offered up by other departments. She questioned the number of trips per day at the Transfer Station. Mr. Schneider stated it is a policy decision as to when the Transfer Station is open. Transfer Station personnel also manage evictions, maintain the closed landfill, pick litter, manage Adopt-A-Highway, do grounds maintenance, and transport waste.

Mr. Schneider concluded by noting that the Public Works budget has been reduced for the last 10 years and now it is time to make policy decisions. Four full-time equivalents (FTEs) have been sacrificed in support divisions. Mr. Schneider does not recommend any further reductions in personnel since Public Works is the department that responds in the first ten days of an emergency. The biggest impact of the proposed reductions will be to internal customers.

Councilor Sheets questioned the lights being used in Town buildings when there are no functions and Mr. Schneider explained that night lighting is used to assist the Police.

Mr. Schneider noted that less than one FTE is being used to service outside agencies.

The Town Manager distributed information on the City of Groton and Groton Long Point budgets.

2009-0305

Council Goalsetting

Discussed

A consolidated list of the goals provided by individual Councilors was distributed. Consideration of this item was tabled to the next meeting.

2010-0036

Connecticut Health Foundation Grant for Healthy Groton Month

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Flax, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2010-0038

Your Safety Company Grant

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Sheets, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2010-0044

Historic Documents Preservation Grant (FY2011)

Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2010-0046

Connecticut Dial-A-Ride Grant

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Monteiro, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

6. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to adjourn the meeting at 9:17 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.